

■ Government study: Chiropractic recommended

In 1994, The United States *Agency for Health Care Policy and Research* reviewed the many different care options for acute low-back pain. The research panel was looking at what would produce *functional improvements* as well as symptomatic improvements. They looked at over 100 studies that related to spinal manipulation (the non-specific, medical term used for Chiropractic adjustments) and concluded it was helpful for people suffering from acute low-back pain.

The researchers also found that other common approaches did not measure up to the standards set. Found to be ineffective and of unproven value were:

Physical Therapy

traction

ultrasound

massage

laser treatment

TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation)

bio-feedback

muscle relaxers

prolonged bed rest (more than 4 days)

injections

steroids

early surgical intervention

acupuncture

Chiropractic was the only option studied found to provide both symptomatic improvement as well as restoration of functional stability. The research panel included medical doctors, osteopaths, nurses and physical therapists. There were no chiropractors included. ▲

■ Chronic low back pain common in children

The May 15, 1997 issue of *Spine* reports on a study that shows nearly 1 in 5 14-16 year olds have back pain and many of them report that the pain is chronic.

18% of the 14-16 year olds reported back pain that interfered with school work or leisure activities during the previous 12 months. 26% of the boys and 33% of the girls reported that the pain was recurrent or chronic. It should be noted that as the children got older, the incidents of pain increased.

The authors concluded that a significant part of the low back pain children report is recurrent or chronic by the time they are 14.

Chiropractors have always encouraged early detection and correction of spinal problems before they become chronic. This study shows that spinal problems do indeed start early in life and if they go uncorrected, get worse. Be sure that your children are regularly checked by your chiropractor to allow for proper spinal hygiene and a better expression of their natural health potential. ▲

■ Low back pain responds better to Chiropractic Care

The May 1, 1998 issue of the *British Medical Journal* reports that three-quarters of the people who go to see their medical doctor with a new episode of lower back pain are still suffering symptoms a year later. Interestingly enough, the same journal in August, 1995 reported on a follow-up study that found patients under Chiropractic care had 29% more improvement than those treated in hospitals after three years.

The 1998 study discovered that most of the people with lower back problems stop consulting their medical doctor after three months but continue to experience pain and related disability one year later.

In the 1995 Chiropractic study the researchers reported that three years after care began, those patients with low back pain who were under chiropractic care got more benefit and long-term satisfaction than those who were treated by hospitals.

It is clear that restoring the normal mechanics, alignment and functional stability of the spinal column through Chiropractic care results in a body that not only feels better, but also one that functions better and is able to repair and maintain itself in a higher state of health. ▲

■ Back surgery patients unsatisfied long-term

The November 15, 1999 *Spine* reports that patients who have had surgery on their lumbar (low back) spine with unsatisfactory long term results continue to have problems and in some cases need to have the surgery a second time.

109 patients who had herniated discs treated with discectomy were tracked from 7 to 20 years afterward. 36% of the long term patients had unsatisfactory results during the follow-up period. More than 25% of the patients continue to experience leg and/or back pain and 7.3% of them needed to have the surgery re-done.

This in in sharp contrast to a study published in the October, 1995 *New England Journal of Medicine* which found patients are much more satisfied with the care given them by their chiropractor than those who went to medical doctors .

42% of those patients who went to a chiropractor for low back pain rated their care as “excellent” while only 27% of those who went to a medical doctor for the same problem rated their care as high.



Chiropractic helps patients with lumbar disk herniation

The *British Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* in the 1997 Supplement III reports that a **single chiropractic adjustment** caused immediate significant changes in the patient's reflexes in patients with disk herniation that was limited to one side of the spine.

The study was done at the Hadassah University in Jerusalem. The authors reported that “It may be concluded that spinal [adjustments] may promote relief from [abnormal nerve function] by the offending disk herniation.”

By way of suggestion, ask your chiropractor about the **long-term** health effects of reconstructive and wellness chiropractic care. ▲

■ Herniated lumbar discs in pregnant women may be on the increase

The *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* reported in a 1995 study that the rates of herniated discs in pregnant women may well be on the rise.

The rise is likely related to the fact that the number of women over 30 having babies for the first time has doubled in the last 20 years.

This study underscores the necessity of Chiropractic care at an early age to maintain spinal integrity and prevent problems from developing later on in life that result from a lack of proper function. ▲

■ Chiropractic Adjustments Increase Range Of Motion

The November/December 2001 issue of the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics* reports that chiropractic adjustments help increase normal range of motion in the spine.

The double-blind randomized study was done at the Phillip Chiropractic Research Centre, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. 105 patients with neck-tension headaches were split into two groups. There were three phases of the study with each group alternately receiving true adjustments, fake adjustments or no adjustments.

After each phase of the study was completed range of motion studies were done. After each group received true chiropractic adjustments, their spinal range of motion increased significantly.

By way of commentary, range of motion may not seem to be a very important thing. However, proper range of motion allows for proper body mechanics, or how well the entire body is able to move and respond to changes in its surroundings. Vertebral subluxations produce abnormal ranges of motion and lead to dysfunctional body mechanics. Correcting subluxations is important because this restricted range of motion can cause spinal problems in other areas to develop as a result. Keeping your spine free of subluxation interference is absolutely vital to a properly functioning, healthy body.

■ Low Back Pain In Children Common, Responds To Chiropractic Care

A study in the January, 2003 *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics* finds that low back pain in children is a very common occurrence and that the vast majority of those children who receive chiropractic care experience improvement.

Recent studies have estimated that approximately 50% of children will experience low back pain at some point and 15% of them experience frequent or continual pain.

In this study, 15 chiropractors collected data on 54 children who came to their offices with low back pain. The average age of the patients was 13.1 years old. 61% of them had acute pain and 47% said that their problem began from a traumatic event, most of the time from a sports-related accident. 24% of the children reported that their problem had lasted longer than 3 months. Almost 90% of the cases examined were diagnosed with spinal subluxations (misalignment of the vertebra).

The researchers concluded that “patients responded favorably to chiropractic management, and there were no reported complications.” “Important” improvement was reported by 87% of the kids after six-weeks of care.

Commentary: Some important things to note about this study include the fact that 50% of kids will likely have low back pain at some point. And seeing that 90% of the kids in this study with low back pain had subluxations present, it would make sense to have them checked by a chiropractor on a regular basis. Many times, by the time pain from a subluxation shows up, it has already been there for a long time. An 87% improvement rate without complications is testimony to the safety and effectiveness of chiropractic care for children.

■ Chiropractic More Effective For Chronic Spinal Pain Than Medication, Acupuncture

A study in the July 15, 2003 issue of Spine reports that in a clinical study of patients with chronic spinal pain, patients receiving chiropractic care responded much more favorably and with better results than patients who went through a regimen of medication or acupuncture.

The study involved 115 patients admitted to an Australian multidisciplinary spinal pain outpatient clinic. Each patient was randomly assigned to receive either chiropractic care, needle acupuncture or medication. Each patient was initially assessed with the Oswestry Back Pain Disability Index (simply known as Oswestry), the Neck Disability Index (NDI), the Short-Form-36 Health Survey questionnaire (SF-36), visual analog scales (VAS) of pain intensity and ranges of movement. The same tests were given again at 2, 5 and 9 weeks into their respective care programs.

According to the results, 27.3% of the patients under chiropractic care experienced early pain relief. Only 9.4% of the acupuncture patients and 5% of the medication patients experienced early pain relief.

The chiropractic patients also had the most improvement when measured by the other tests with improvements of 50% on the Oswestry, 38% on the NDI, 47% on the SF-36 and 50% on the VAS for back pain.

Commentary: This study concentrated on the early relief of pain, obviously an important concern for the patients experiencing it. And as important as your pain relief may be, your chiropractor is also concerned about the long-term correction of your spinal problems.

Chiropractic Care Reduces X-Rays, Surgeries

A study in the October 11, 2004 issue of the Archives of Internal Medicine reports that low back pain patients with chiropractic coverage in their insurance plan needed less surgery and fewer X-rays than patients on the same insurance plan without chiropractic coverage.

In the largest study of its type, four years of back pain claims were examined. 700,000 insured patients with chiropractic coverage were compared with 1,000,000 insured members without chiropractic coverage. Other than the chiropractic coverage, both groups of patients were on the same insurance plan.

By comparing the two groups, the study found that:

- Chiropractic care cut the overall cost of back pain care by 28%.
- Chiropractic care reduced the cost of X-rays and MRIs by 37%.
- Chiropractic care reduced back pain patient hospitalizations by 41%.
- Chiropractic care reduced the number of back surgeries by 32%.

Dr. Douglas Metz, chief health services officer at American Specialty Health, the insurer that sponsored the study said, “No matter how we perform the analysis – whether we look at total costs to the health plan, at lower back pain care, at musculoskeletal care – in each data set, the population covered for chiropractic had a lower overall cost to the health plan than the population without access to chiropractic benefits.”

Although this study did not examine patient satisfaction, Metz says that other company studies show that 95% of chiropractic patients are satisfied with the care they receive.

Commentary: It always comes down to “try the simple things first” doesn’t it? The simple, yet effective process of restoring and maintaining proper body function through lifetime chiropractic care should be a major component of everyone’s health plan.

■ Chronic Back Pain Causes Brain To Shrink

The November 23, 2004 issue of The Journal of Neuroscience finds that for every year people experience chronic back pain, they can lose as much as 11 percent of their gray matter brain tissue.

11 percent translates into 1.3 cubic centimeters and is equal to the same amount of brain density lost in 10 to 20 years of normal aging. The gray matter processes memory and information.

In the study, MRIs and other analytical tests were performed on 26 people with chronic, continuous pain of more than a year. Their results were compared with 26 healthy people experiencing no pain.

The researchers say one explanation is that the gray matter of the brain is affected by the negative stress that results from the continuous perception of chronic pain. This constant stress results in overuse atrophy or burnout shrinkage.

The good news is that the researchers think that some of the shrinkage occurs without the loss of a lot of brain cells. That suggests that the loss can be reversed once the chronic pain ends.

According to the authors, 25 percent of Americans experience back pain with 25 percent of them experiencing chronic pain.

Commentary: We would like to see research that determines if the brain matter atrophy still occurs in chronic pain patients taking pain relievers. In many situations the body is still affected by the stress effects of chronic pain even though it is chemically turned off.

■ Spinal Whiplash Injury Decreases Physical, Mental Function

A Canadian study reported in the September 2005 issue of the *Annals of Rheumatic Diseases* finds that spinal whiplash injuries suffered by people involved in automobile accidents lead to lower physical and mental functioning in as little as one month.

The investigators collected data on 7,462 people within one month of their accident: Patient demographics, collision-related factors, health histories previous to the accident and what kind and severity of symptoms were collected and examined. 45% of the patients involved agreed to fill out and follow up on the SF-36, a general health questionnaire.

Most of the people experienced a wide range of symptomatic malfunction after the initial injury including neck pain, low back pain, fatigue, dizziness, headache, spinal pain, nausea and jaw pain. One month after injury, the patients filling out the SF-36 form showed low physical and mental function.

According to the authors, the study was designed to describe, using a large population, “the clinical spectrum of initial symptom expression and health related measures of Whiplash Associated Disorders (WAD).”

They go on to say that as a result of their study, WAD “is best appreciated as a syndrome extending well beyond what can be labeled as a neck injury.”

Commentary: Chiropractors are certainly not surprised that spinal injury can result in body malfunction. We are surprised that the authors go on to conclude that “More research is needed for a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms involved so that treatment can be directed at the broad spectrum of the [symptoms] rather than focusing on finding a focal neck injury.”

While some may consider that this suggestion reflects an appropriate approach to health care, we feel it represents a fundamental fault in logic that seems to permeate modern medical health care on many levels. A localized injury of the spinal structures in the neck produces a myriad of symptoms and physical and mental malfunction. Rather than focus on the cause of the problem and repairing the damage to the spine (as occurs in chiropractic care), the authors suggest that we should ignore the cause and instead concentrate on treating the symptoms? With this kind of illogical thought process, if the authors sat on a tack, they would take pain medication rather than pull out the tack.